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## **MATCHING UP WITH UNCLE SAM**

Entrepreneurs make their own success by aggressively pursuing opportunities presented to them. Joe Lopez knows all about opportunities and how to make them happen. That's what makes him an entrepreneurial success story.

Following years spent as a general construction laborer working for others, Joe pursued his dream of being his own boss. His entrepreneurial career began modestly with the acquisition, rehab and resale of several Cleveland area residential properties, but Joe has taken those humble beginnings and grown his New Era Builders, Inc. into a commercial construction firm that now generates in excess of \$18 million in annual revenues! Part of that growth is due to work that Joe's company does for the federal government.

Always seeking opportunities for new business, Joe learned from SBA's Cleveland District Office about an upcoming Business Matchmaking Event. Sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the event held at Cleveland Browns Stadium on October 9 and 10, 2002, marked the first of 15 such meetings held throughout the country in 2002 and 2003. As part of the registration for these events, small business owners and buying agents completed online profiles of what they do or what products or services they were looking to purchase, and the system then "matched" them together. The matched businesses and buyers then got together at pre-scheduled, one-on-one meetings over the two day event to discuss potential business opportunities.

New Era Builders' services matched the needs of several potential buyers that attended the event. Joe enthusiastically attended the conference and came away with a \$300,000 order from the U.S. Navy for security upgrades to the Marine Corps Reserve Center in Brookpark, Ohio. This represented the first contract awarded as a result of the matchmaking event. New Era successfully completed the contract, and the Navy was very pleased with New Era's workmanship on the job.

New Era Builders Inc. is an SBA certified 8(a) company. The 8(a) Business Development program supports minority-owned government contractors through a wide range of services. Through this program, New Era Builders has received contract awards from the U.S. Coast Guard, General Services Administration (GSA), the Veterans Administration (VA), and NASA.

In part due to its government contracting work, New Era Builders Inc. has seen its revenues grow roughly 750% over the past five years! Presently his federal contracts contribute

approximately 15% toward his total revenues. Joe Lopez strives to make his New Era Builders into the largest Hispanic-owned general contracting firm in Northeast Ohio, and, based on his success to date, it is apparent that he is well on his way to making that goal a reality.

Despite his success, Joe remains humble and dedicated to giving back to his community. He readily volunteers his time to a myriad of community organizations, including The Cleveland Regional Minority Purchasing Council, the Hispanic Business Association, the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Esperanza, and Leadership Cleveland. Joe remembers his roots and volunteers much of his time helping others pursue their own entrepreneurial opportunities!